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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ACCRA 000234

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TAGS: [GH](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#)

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH NDC PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE MILLS

REF: ACCRA 165

Classified By: PolChief Scott Ticknor for reasons 1.5 d and e.

11. (C) Summary: During a January 26 meeting with PolChief, former Vice President and NDC presidential candidate John Evans Atta Mills provided additional details on an alleged plot to assassinate former President Rawlings. He commented on his health, saying he had received radiation therapy for a sinus infection. Reconciliation between Rawlings and President Kufuor would continue to be difficult, despite Mills' recent meeting with Kufuor and former (returned) UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. End summary.

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Rawlings Assassination Plots  
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12. (C) In a January 17 meeting with PolChief and visiting AF/W Desk Officer (reftel), Mills claimed to know about a recent plot to assassinate former president J.J. Rawlings. When asked for more details in the January 26 meeting, Mills said some colleagues informed him about one month ago that some members of the GOG and ruling NPP party had sent professional assassins from the United States to assassinate Rawlings in Ghana. Mills was clear that there was no USG connection and he was not sure of the nationality of the reported assassins. His colleagues had informed Rawlings, who specifically asked that they brief Mills as well. Mills communicated the information to officials working for National Security Coordinator Francis Poku, but he never heard back on this. Mills confirmed that he takes this report seriously because of past apparent attempts to kill Rawlings and because of the fact that Rawlings has many enemies who would like to see him dead.

His Health  
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13. (C) Mills acknowledged that his opponents continue to use the issue of his health for political reasons. He told PolChief he had contracted a serious sinus infection, probably from swimming, which a Chinese doctor friend in Ghana told him could be diagnosed using an MRI. Since Ghana did not have MRI capabilities at that time, his Chinese friend encouraged him to get an MRI in China, which he did. The MRI confirmed his infection, which Chinese doctors claimed would have to be treated with radiation therapy. Mills said he did not want to have the treatment in China, which he was told would take six weeks. Instead he sought treatment in South Africa, where his nephew lives. South African doctors confirmed the diagnosis and treated him with radiation in his nasal passages. As a result of the radiation and a soar throat from the therapy session, he was unable to eat solids for several weeks and lost significant

weight, which he was warned would be an expected consequence of the treatment. He told PolChief he is pleased with his weight loss (which he maintains with dietary changes) and has fully recovered from the sinus infection. He is frustrated with the allegations that he has cancer or the most recent allegation that he has heart problems and hopes these rumors will eventually die down. He confirmed plans to go to South Africa for a routine health checkup, which he said he has long postponed.

#### Reconciliation

¶4. (C) Ghana needs political reconciliation, Mills stated, adding that if he wins the 2008 election he will reach out to President Kufuor. His attendance at the welcome reception for visiting UN Secretary General Kofi Annan on January 24 (his first time in the Castle in six years) was "a very easy decision" because of his close relationship to Annan. When the NDC was in power, the Rawlings government fought hard (with support from the U.S., Mills acknowledged) to get Kofi Annan selected as Secretary General. Mills is related to Annan (they have nieces in common and they are both ethnic Fantis). In addition, Mills said he went to the Castle to "signal a desire for unity". Mills pointed out that many senior members of the Kufuor government were once students of his, like National Security Minister Poku, Attorney General Ghartey and others. He does not bear ill will toward them, he added.

¶5. (C) He was not overly optimistic about the chances for broader reconciliation at this time, given the "bad blood" between Rawlings and Kufuor. He conceded that Rawlings had made mistakes in judgment over the years, is suspicious of everyone and sometimes comes across "undiplomatically". Mills also noted that he and Rawlings have had serious

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differences in the past, and that because of this Mills did not see a significant role for himself in reconciling the two "Johns". He also blamed Kufuor, who Mills said "is all smiles but a very vindictive person underneath" and periodically fans the flames with provocative statements about Rawlings. Mills thought Rawlings greatly respects Kofi Annan, who he opined would try to reconcile President Kufuor and the former president. Rawlings also reportedly greatly respects former President Clinton, who Mills also thought could play a useful mediating role in Ghana.

#### Comment

¶6. (C) As we have noted before, we are unable to judge Mills' take on the assassination plot. Rawlings tends to be paranoid about his security. Foreign Service Health Practitioner at post notes that MRIs are usually not required to diagnose sinus problems unless a physician is concerned about tumors. He also notes that radiation therapy is not usually used to treat sinus infections (usually antibiotics or surgical repairs are used), but that such therapy is more likely used to treat some form of cancer. Foreign Service Health Practitioner is a Physician Assistant, not a specialist in the field. However, his medical observations point to a potential bigger health problem, as does the fact that to date Mills has not made public any health records to dispel the rumors.

¶7. (C) Mills has increasingly opened up to PolChief and was surprisingly willing to discuss his health in detail. This speaks to the closer relationship this Mission has forged with the NDC, which used to be more suspicious of the U.S. and Embassy contact. We have also seen a greater receptivity in our more recent meetings with President Rawlings and with NDC Chairman Kwabena Adjei, who this week told PolChief the Embassy had transformed its relationship with his party. This strengthens our credentials as a neutral advocate for

democracy in Ghana and allows us to better influence the more moderate tendencies within the NDC.

BRIDGEWATER